

Remarks in a Discussion on Job Training in Arnold, Maryland

March 2, 2005

The President. I appreciate the warm welcome. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thank you all. Go ahead and be seated; we've got some work to do. We're here to talk about an important issue, and that is how to make sure people get the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's what we're here to talk about.

No better place to talk about that than at a community college which is working, and we're here at a good community college. I want to thank Marty Smith. She is one of our panelists. As you can see, we've got a distinguished panel. You're about to hear some interesting stories that I think will pertain to—will make why I believe the community college system is vital to the future of our country real evident to you.

The Governor is here. How about that? Governor Ehrlich, appreciate you coming. And we've got Kendel, First Lady. And we've got Drew. Mom and Dad here?

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. Mom and Dad are here.

The President. Mom and Dad—still listening to Mom, aren't you?

Governor Ehrlich. Absolutely.

The President. Yes, so am I. [Laughter] Laura sends her best. She's back at the White House. She wants to say hello to her friends in Maryland. She's doing great. She and I are going to go Pittsburgh next week to talk about her initiative, which I embrace wholeheartedly, and that is how to help young men realize the great promise of this country, how to fight off the temptation to join gangs and instead join society as a productive citizen. Part of that is to make sure the education system works well. So we're here on an education mission, really, to make sure education is relevant.

I want to thank Jim Fielder, who's the secretary of labor for the State of Maryland. I appreciate you being here, Jim.

A couple of things I want to say. First of all, freedom is on the march. It's a profound period of time. Our Secretary of State is returning from her trip to Europe. I will visit with her tomorrow afternoon. I talked to her

on the phone yesterday. I applauded the press conference she held with the Foreign Minister from France, where both of them stood up and said loud and clear to Syria, "You get your troops and your secret services out of Lebanon so that good democracy has a chance to flourish."

The world is working together for the sake of freedom and peace. The world is speaking with one voice when it comes to making sure that democracy has a chance to flourish in Lebanon and throughout the greater Middle East. And when democracies take hold, the world becomes more peaceful; the world becomes a better place for our children and our grandchildren. So I look forward to continuing to work with friends and allies to advance freedom, not America's freedom but universal freedom, freedom granted by a Higher Being.

I also appreciate the good growth of our economy in places like Maryland. Governor, you get—deserve a lot of credit for creating conditions where the entrepreneurial spirit is strong.

Governor Ehrlich. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. You've got an unemployment rate of 4 percent in the State of Maryland. That speaks volumes about good leadership. We've got a national unemployment rate of 5.2 percent. The fundamental question is, how do we keep growing? And so I look forward to working with Congress to continue to advance commonsensical lawsuit reform.

We did something on class-action lawsuits. Republicans and Democrats got together and said, "Wait a minute. We've got a problem. The scales of justice are not balanced, so let's balance them with reasonable reform." We got a good class-action bill to my desk, which I signed. Now it's time for Congress to do something on asbestos, to get good reform to make sure that job creators and people who are harmed—job creators are able to create jobs and people who are actually harmed by asbestos get the settlements they're due.

Congress needs to continue to work on legal reform, including legal reform to make sure good doctors aren't run out of practice. We need medical liability reform.

We need to get an energy bill to my desk. In order to make sure people can find work here in Maryland, this country needs to have an energy bill, something that makes us—that recognizes we can do a better job of conserving energy, we can spend money on renewable sources of energy. I like the idea of using corn and soybeans to help produce energy. I mean, after all, it would be neat, someday, Governor, if somebody walked in and said, “We’re growing more crop, and therefore, we’re less dependent on foreign sources of energy.” We need to modernize the electricity grid. And I put this in front of the Congress 3 years ago or 4 years ago. They need to get it together. They need to come together, stop debating about an energy plan, and pass one, for the sake of jobs and job creation.

We’ve got to do something about the deficit. I submitted a good, lean budget to Congress. Some of them get carried away when it comes to spending, and we have—we want to make sure that we meet priorities and cut this deficit of ours in half by the year 2009. It’s important. It’s an important signal to capital markets; it’s an important signal to the world that we’re serious about deficits.

And we’re serious about long-term deficits, and we have a long-term deficit when it comes to Social Security. There’s a lot of baby boomers, like me, getting ready to retire—[laughter]—fortunately, in my case, later rather than sooner. And baby boomers are living longer than the generation before us, and baby boomers have been promised more benefits than the generation before us. And yet, there are fewer workers paying for the baby boomers when they retire.

And if you add up the math, it says “problem.” In the year 2018, the Social Security system goes into the red. In other words, more money is going out than is coming in. Just catch this statistic: In 2027, the Government will be \$200 billion short—200 billion short. That’s money going out more than coming in on payroll taxes.

So if you’re a young person going to school here, you ought to be asking the question to public officials, “What are you going to do about the problem?” Now, older Americans have nothing to worry about; nothing changes. I don’t care what the propaganda

says. You’re taken care of and will be taken care of. But younger Americans need to worry, because when you think about a system that goes in the red 200 billion one year, more the next year, more the next year, and more the next year, you need to be asking people like me and Members of the United States Congress, “You better fix it before it becomes a crisis. Don’t be passing on problems to future generations. You were elected, Members of Congress were elected to solve problems now.” And so I intend to work with members of both parties to get this problem fixed.

And I’m going to travel this country a lot talking about the issue of Social Security. Friday, I’m off to New Jersey and Indiana. Every week I’m going to be out talking about the problem, assuring seniors that nothing will change, and reminding young Americans that they need to write the Congress, the Senators and the House of Representatives, and demand action, so that we don’t stick a young generation with serious problems that will wreck our economy and wreck their lives.

Today I want to talk about education. Education, making sure we’ve got an educated workforce, is a vital part of making sure this economy of ours continues to grow. I’ve talked to a lot of employers around and say, “What is the biggest concern you have?” And one of the biggest concerns they have is the fact that they don’t have workers with the skill sets necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. So that’s the challenge we face. And what we’re going to talk about today is a commonsense solution of how to address that challenge and solve that problem.

First thing is, we’ve got to make sure our kids can read and write and add and subtract. The No Child Left Behind Act is working. The No Child Left Behind Act says States get to control the curriculum and decide what to do, but it says in return for increased Federal money, we want to see whether or not a child can read. In other words, we believe in accountability and measuring.

There’s an achievement gap closing in America, and that’s important. But how do we know? Because we measure. You don’t know if you don’t measure. You can’t solve a problem until you diagnose the problem.

And for too long, too many children were just shuffled through the system. Too many minority children, too many inner-city children were just moved through in the hopes that somebody got educated. But that didn't work. So now we're measuring early so we can solve problems early. And No Child Left Behind is paying off.

And we need to extend those high standards to high schools. I appreciate the national Governors coming together to talk about how to build on the reform—not weaken the reforms of No Child Left Behind, how to build on the reforms so that a high school degree means something.

Then the next fundamental question is, what do we do with people coming out of high school or people who have been in high school and have gone into the workplace but realized they want to continue to advance by gaining a new set of skills? That's what we're here to talk about.

Let me tell you something about the community college system. When I was the Governor of Texas, I realized what a valuable asset the community college system was to my State, just like your Governor recognizes what an asset it is to Maryland. Community colleges are available. They are affordable, and they are flexible. And that's important. It's important to have a place of higher education that has got the capacity to adjust its curriculum to meet the needs of an employer base, for example. I mean, if all of a sudden somebody pops up and says, "We need more nurses," it makes sense to have a community college system that says, "We'll help you put the curriculum in place to train people for nursing." And we're going to talk a little bit about that here in a minute.

When you've got a growing economy in the 21st century, there's a certain skill set that's needed to fill the jobs. And what we're talking about today is how to fill those jobs. One of the things we've done in the last couple of years through the Department of Labor was to encourage public-private partnerships. And we'll continue—going to do that over the next 4 years. That's—those are fancy words for saying, "Look, we're going to help employers and community colleges match up needs, demands, with supply." That's what that means.

Last year, I called upon Congress to pass a \$250 million initiative to support our community colleges and to fund partnerships between community colleges and local employers. They funded it, and now some money is going to start heading out. And that's an important part of the initiative I'm talking about. We're going to hear from an employer and a community college on how they work together and how the system functions best when it's flexible.

The second thing that I want to talk to you about is—Congress is now going to debate what's called the—reforms to the Workforce Investment Act. We spend about \$16 billion a year on workforce training, except only about 200,000 people got trained. It's not a very good record. See, part of my job as the President and part of people whose job it is to watch your taxpayers' money, is to say, "Is the program actually working?" It sounds good, doesn't it? "Let's spend money for workforce training." It's just when you train 200,000 people with 16 billion, I think we can do a better job than that. *[Laughter]* And one way to do so is to recognize the problems, the bottlenecks.

The system is very complex and complicated. There's a lot of programs in Washington with all sorts of different rules across, I think, 10 different jurisdictions. A bureaucratic nightmare may be the appropriate way to describe it—kind of, mandates coming out of Washington, DC, tend to complicate the issue of the Workforce Investment Boards and make the Governor's job more complicated. And people at the very end of the system kind of wonder what the heck is going on between the intent of Washington and money actually making it down into the trenches.

And so I've called upon Congress to add—to put these monies together, reduce the bureaucracies, the strings, and to let States—gives States the flexibility to focus on workforce training that meets the best needs of each State. The best reform possible, it seems like to me, is to kind of bundle up the programs in a flexible way that says Governor Ehrlich, elected by the people, ought to work with the local jurisdictions to figure out how best to spend the money to meet the needs of the Maryland citizens. In other

words, more flexibility, in my judgment, will mean more people will be trained for the jobs at hand.

A little problem for some in Washington—why trust the Governor? *[Laughter]* I encountered that when I was a Governor. Good news is, I was a Governor. I trust local people. It's a fundamental part of my political philosophy, the closer decisionmaking is to the people, the better the decisionmaking will be. And so Washington ought to be flexible. We at least ought to shoot for 400,000 people trained a year. *[Laughter]* And it's important.

The other thing is, is when I've mentioned higher ed—community colleges being affordable, they are affordable, but we've got to recognize people still need help coming to a community college. We spend \$80 billion a year at the Federal level in student loans and Pell grants. I've submitted a budget to the Congress that increases Pell grants from 12.4 billion to 18 billion. And the reason why is—that's a year, by the way—because Pell grants are important. I love Pell grants because they help folks that need help. They really reinforce dreams, don't they? You got a society that says, "Aim big; dream big." And what a Pell grant does, it says, for those who can't afford higher education, "The rightful role of Government is to help you realize your dreams."

And so Congress, I'm confident, will act on the Pell grant increase. The Pell grant increase really talks about increasing the maximum grant award. It increases the amount each recipient of a Pell grant can get, and that's good. It needs to be adjusted up, which we want. We also believe students attending college year-round ought to receive Pell grants year-round. This will help create flexibility for the students.

And we've got the loans out there. People say to me, "Do I have to repay my loan?" *[Laughter]* Yes. *[Laughter]* It's part of a responsible society, isn't it? We said, "We want the loans to be more reasonable in repayment schedule and the interest rates to be more reasonable."

In other words, I look forward to working with Congress to help higher ed become more affordable for people from all walks of life. It's a good use of your money. It really

is. And it makes sense, particularly, in a changing world, where the job base is changing and the skill sets for those jobs are changing dramatically.

You know, technology changes, but labor lags behind when it comes to change. And therefore, we have a duty and a responsibility to use our assets, like the community college system, to enable people to get the skills to work. And as that happens, this economy is going to continue to grow. One of the bottlenecks for economic expansion and vitality is to make sure we match jobs that exist with skill sets of willing workers.

Somebody who understands that is the Governor. Governor, thanks for joining us. I'm honored you're here.

Governor Ehrlich. Mr. President.

The President. Why don't you share with the good folks, the C-SPAN watchers what—*[laughter]*—

Governor Ehrlich. Hi, everybody.

The President. —like my mother. Hi, Mom. How are you doing? *[Laughter]*

Governor Ehrlich. And my mom is here too.

The President. Yes, well, why don't you tell us what you're doing in Maryland. People are interested to know. Just give us where you are.

Governor Ehrlich. First of all, I want some extra credit for wearing my "W" tie today.

The President. Very good, yes. Hot item.

Governor Ehrlich. He didn't even charge me.

The President. I don't know about the pink. *[Laughter]*

Governor Ehrlich. Mr. President, we've been joined today by my Cabinet. And if I can just take one second—and former Governor Marvin Mandel. Would my Cabinet please stand up? These are the folks that implement your policies, your programs.

The President. Thank you.

[At this point, Governor Ehrlich made further remarks.]

The President. Let me—it's important for people to understand what he's saying there, if you don't mind. See, in order for—the way the rules are written, in order for the State

of Maryland to implement a workforce training program that meets your needs, often-times the Governor has to come and ask for a waiver. Think about that kind of system, right? We want to do something. We want to help the country meet an objective, but we need a waiver. We need permission.

And so, I think there's like—I forgot how many waivers have been granted over the last year, but it's a system that says—it begs for reform. You know, the more time you ask for waivers, the less time you're focused on what you're doing.

Governor Ehrlich. The more time you take up with asking for waivers, the less time you have to put money into the workplace to train and retrain. At 3.8, 3.9 percent unemployment, retraining is really part of our focus here. Secretary Fielder, Secretary Melissaratos, they're living this. So we thank you very much.

The President. What are you doing different?

Governor Ehrlich. Well, as I said, we're ahead of the curve. We have begun one-stop shops. We've consolidated programs, basically along the line of what you're advocating.

The President. Nobody knows what a one-stop shop is.

Governor Ehrlich. You're a worker; you go online. You're an employer; you go online. You match it up—a one-stop shop. That's taking advantage of technology. Obviously, by the way, you are one of the best here. Marty is one of the best. You're one of the best community colleges in the State of Maryland. We'll work with our community colleges.

The President. Let me ask you something. Somebody out there listening who's looking for a job in the State of Maryland—one-stop shop online. In other words, they—you've got this all—

Governor Ehrlich. Call Secretary Fielder's department, his agency, and we'll put you in touch with—if you have a resume, you have a job waiting for you in the State of Maryland today. That's the message that needs to go out, not just in Maryland but around the country. We're at 3.8, 3.9 percent. We want to go to 0.0, Mr. President. I want to report to you 0.0. How about that

for a goal? I told you we set high benchmarks around here.

The President. That's right. I like the fact that the State has got a system, a kind of a virtual workforce agency where people can get on the Internet and find out what's available, I presume, where the closest one-stop shop is, if they want to go in in person. At a one-stop shop, people can find all kinds of advice on how to get a scholarship, what's available, the closest community college, what the curriculum looks like in your community college. It is a place all designed to help somebody who wants to advance receive the help necessary to advance.

Governor Ehrlich. And our ability, by the way, to do what we've been able to do and get some waivers, although it is time-consuming, has allowed us to put additional dollars where it belongs, into what you're talking about. More bang for the buck for the taxpayer—in this case, the Federal taxpayer and the Maryland taxpayer—dollars into the field so that employers can truly find the employees they need and, particularly given this economy and how quickly we turn over, post-industrial Maryland, post-industrial America, retrain our workers.

The President. Good job, Bobby.

Governor Ehrlich. Thank you.

The President. They call you Bobby?

Governor Ehrlich. Absolutely, Mr. President. You can call me anything you want, Mr. President.

The President. Dr. Marty Smith. She is the—[*applause*—she's not going to give you an A just because you're cheering loud. [*Laughter*] You have been here how long?

Dr. Martha A. Smith. I'm in year 11.

The President. As the president.

Dr. Smith. Yes, sir, I am.

The President. And so, is this your only community college experience?

Dr. Smith. Actually, I was president of Dundalk Community College, just up the road, for about 7 years.

The President. Good, good. Give us a sense of how the community college system—what's changed and what hasn't changed, just over the last 18 years.

Dr. Smith. Sure. First of all, I have to say, on behalf of all of us, we are so honored

to have you at Anne Arundel Community College.

The President. Thank you.

Dr. Smith. Thank you so much for selecting Anne Arundel Community College.

The President. Thanks.

Dr. Smith. You're welcome.

The President. Appreciate you putting up with the entourage.

Dr. Smith. Oh, they were wonderful. They were wonderful.

The President. That's good. That's the way they should be.

Dr. Smith. And I also want to thank you for our outstanding support and understanding for our country's community colleges. You really get it, as we just heard—

The President. Thank you.

Dr. Smith. —related to job training, so thank you so much.

[*Dr. Smith made further remarks.*]

The President. For those of you who are, like, market advocates, who believe the market is a powerful way to have an efficient delivery of service, listen to what she just said: "We respond. We respond to demand. We adjust. We don't adjust because Government said, 'Adjust.' We adjust because our customers, the students and the employers, have said, 'Adjust; stay relevant.' Otherwise, if you don't adjust, you'll become irrelevant." Great statement. I think it's very important for people to understand the great assets. This is a tremendous asset you have in your State.

So, anyway, the reason I asked what has changed over 18 years is because it was a way for me to lead the witness to say—[*laughter*—a lot has changed. [*Laughter*] Because community colleges have got the capacity to change. Seriously, I mean, I presume the emphasis has shifted quite dramatically.

Dr. Smith. Well, it has. Traditionally, we have talked about associate degrees and certificates and the credit program, but what we understand now is that students don't necessarily, when they're looking for a job that's going to pay them an appropriate salary, they don't care whether it's credit or noncredit. They want it now. They want the skill set and the knowledge set that's going to help

them get into that workforce quickly and be successful and advance in that profession. So it's changed incredibly. Every year, we are developing 20 new short-term programs to really try to meet the specific needs of the industry, and as you know, things are changing so quickly in every industry that it's imperative that we change.

The President. So how do you know? How do you—what do you—how are you structured so that information is able to get to you and your curriculum designers?

Dr. Smith. Well, we have a number of program advisory committees where we have business leaders and employers who give their time and energy to meet with us on a regular basis to say, "This is what we see is coming down the pike for our industry." We have a wonderful Governor's Workforce Investment Board that is investing incredible amounts of time and energy, analyzing each and every one of the high-growth industries so that they can say, "These are the levels of employees that we are going to need in the next 5 years. Community colleges, we look to you to make it happen."

The President. Yes, interesting, isn't it? Fascinating, I think. It's such a hopeful system, and it's working.

So, Joyce Phillip is with us. You work with Joyce, right?

Dr. Smith. I do.

The President. Yes, okay. Joyce, tell us, everybody, what you do.

Joyce Phillip. I'm vice president of human resources at Anne Arundel Medical Center—

The President. Good.

Ms. Phillip. —which is a 260-bed not-for-profit regional medical center, a wonderful place to work.

The President. Well, thank you, yes. So why are you—besides being invited—[*laughter*—why is this conversation relevant to you and your hospital?

Ms. Phillip. This conversation is so relevant to me and to our hospital and to all the industries in Anne Arundel County. We work very closely with the community college. For instance, you know that there are great shortages in allied health fields. Last year, we were able to hire 97 applicants from—who had attended Anne Arundel

Community College. Thirteen of them were nursing students.

The President. Yes, it's interesting, isn't it? So the health care field, it's changing.

Ms. Phillip. Oh, it is changing tremendously.

The President. Skill sets—new skill sets are required.

Ms. Phillip. Yes. And when there are new skill sets that are required, we're able to go to our community college, which is right there, tell them what we need, ask them, "How can we do it?" And they come up with the creative ways to do it, and they make it happen.

The President. Isn't that interesting? So the hospital system says, "We need"—how many people did you hire last year?

Ms. Phillip. Ninety-seven.

The President. Ninety-seven.

Ms. Phillip. Thirteen nurses.

The President. Thirteen nurses. So somebody says—well, you say to the community college, "In order for us to hire these people, they've got to be able to do X, Y, and Z."

Ms. Phillip. That is correct.

The President. The community college then says, "Okay, fine. We will provide professors, teachers, to teach people"—

Ms. Phillip. Develop the curriculum.

The President. —"develop the curriculum for X, Y and Z," and then the people are able to get work. That's—it's as simple as that.

Ms. Phillip. They are. It sounds simple—

The President. It's not. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Phillip. It's not.

The President. I read your mind.

Ms. Phillip. When you are able to partner with the community college, and when you're able to partner with an employer and put some of our money together, some of your Pell grant and Federal money together, we can do it.

The President. Right. Yes, it's good, interesting. And so, is this a field that has got a—constantly in need for new workers?

Ms. Phillip. It's definitely going to be a need for new workers. All you need to do is look at the population as we age. We're going to need people who are going to be able to meet the needs and take care of those

people who have served America and take care of those people who are there.

The President. Do you have programs within your hospitals where you take people who already have a job and enhance their skill set at the community college?

Ms. Phillip. I wanted to say something. That makes me more excited, because we have a program that the community college and the Department of Labor worked on, and it's called School at Work.

[*Ms. Phillip made further remarks.*]

The President. There's something we're about to talk about here. There's a—the term of art these days is productivity and how does the worker become more productive. Well, there's one way a worker becomes more productive, and that is to enhance skills through education, additional education. And when you hear the word "productivity," you think about—you need to think about higher wages. A more productive society is one in which a worker makes more money. That's just a fact of life. So you can either look at the community college system as a way to enhance an individual's productivity, or another way to look at it is, one way to increase your wage is to come back to school and gain a new skill set. This is a wage-increasing institution.

And it's a—somebody who knows that and understands that is Jeannetta Smith. She's with us today. Thanks for coming.

Jeannetta Smith. Thank you for having me.

The President. It's an interesting story. So where were you raised?

Ms. Smith. I'm from North Carolina—Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

The President. There you go. If you've never been there, it's a beautiful part of the world. And so what were you doing there?

Ms. Smith. Shortly after high school, I started working in a textile plant—

The President. Right.

Ms. Smith. —textile factory. North Carolina had lots of textile plants, and the textile industry was leaving.

The President. The textile industry was leaving is right. A lot of people were getting laid off. So what did you do?

Ms. Smith. I thought about it, and I thought I should leave before I got cut. [Laughter]

[Ms. Smith, Anne Arundel Community College student and licensed practical nurse, Northwest Hospital Center, Randallstown, MD, made further remarks.]

The President. Good. By the way, this is—Maryland has got a fantastic community college system; so does North Carolina. And it's been a vital part of helping people transition from what was once a viable industry to the new viable industries within the State, including health care.

Anyway, so you did the 7-year deal. Then what happened?

Ms. Smith. I relocated. I did some travel nursing, and I ended up here in Maryland.

The President. I found that interesting, travel nursing. It's kind of like an itinerant preacher in the old days, you know. [Laughter] What is travel nursing? Explain that.

Ms. Smith. A travel nurse is a nurse that contracts with a hospital in different States or different cities or even in your hometown. You contract for either 3 months or 6 months. Your company finds you an apartment. They furnish it. They provide everything, and you work. So you get to be a tourist for free.

The President. Yes, that's interesting, isn't it? [Laughter] Kind of an interesting concept. It does say there's certainly an opportunity for people. If you're having to—if a hospital has to staff a hospital staff with a travel nurse, I presume that they're looking for full-time nurses. Not to say the travel nurse isn't important, but it just goes to show there's a demand for nursing.

And then, anyway, so you're a travel nurse, and you settle here?

Ms. Smith. Yes.

The President. I don't blame you. [Laughter] It's a beautiful part of the world.

Ms. Smith. It's a wonderful State, also.

The President. Yes, it is. And so what are you doing?

Ms. Smith. I work at Northwest Hospital as an LPN on the subacute unit, but I decided because LPN positions are limited, I wanted to explore other options.

The President. Good.

Ms. Smith. I decided to go to the community college here in Anne Arundel County because it offered a flexible program, LPN to RN transition, which would take one year, and it would increase my salary 50 percent.

The President. Yes, listen to that for a minute. [Applause] Hold on for a second. If you're out there listening as to whether or not somebody who had a high school degree and has spent a few years working after the high school, whether or not going back to a community college makes sense, just listen to what Jeannetta said. By going back to school for a year, she increases her pay by 50 percent. That's an important benefit for people.

Was it hard to go back to school?

Ms. Smith. It was very difficult. As most adults start working, they get bills, mortgages, car payments. So to go back to school requires a commitment of time, which usually means they can't work full-time.

The President. Right. And did you get help?

Ms. Smith. Yes, I did. I was able to benefit not from Pell grants but from Federal student loans, which have been wonderful. I have a 3 percent interest rate, which is a great investment. [Laughter]

The President. It's not exactly a grant, but 3 percent is pretty low.

Ms. Smith. Three percent is great.

The President. Was it easy to get the loan?

Ms. Smith. Yes, yes. No credit check. [Laughter]

The President. We don't need to go that far. Wait a minute. Of course, you would have passed anyway. [Laughter] Whew. [Laughter]

Ms. Smith. But in addition to the Federal student loan, Northwest Hospital also offers tuition reimbursement, which has been fabulous in helping me make my ends meet as I work a part-time schedule there.

The President. Yes, smart employers all across the country are interested in partnering with a potential employee or a current employee by saying, "We'll help you." People should recognize there's a lot of help available if you have the desire to go back to school. Government can't make you have desire. The Government can't say,

“Be desirous.” [Laughter] But Government can say, “If you are desirous, we want to help you.” And that’s what Jeannetta found out.

So where are you in your course thing now? You——

Ms. Smith. Well, I graduate in May, May 25th.

The President. There you go, good.

Ms. Smith. And you’re invited.

The President. I’m invited? Thanks for the invitation. [Laughter] And so then what happens?

Ms. Smith. Well, I’ll start working at least one year here in Maryland as a med/surg nurse at an area hospital to get my skills up and experience as a registered nurse. And the sky is the limit after that.

The President. You’re going to be the travel thing, travel nurse?

Ms. Smith. Yes.

The President. Fantastic. I love the story. Think about this. Textile worker, hears the textile industry is laying off, which they were in North Carolina, decides to do something about it. Community college provides an opportunity to enhance the skill—her skill set; the Government provides ways to help; and this person is living the American Dream. I mean, this is—I thank you for sharing that with us.

Ms. Smith. You’re welcome. Thank you.

The President. All right, Elliott Ward. Glad you’re here, Elliott.

Elliott Ward. Glad to be here, sir.

The President. Thanks for coming, brother.

Mr. Ward. Thanks for having me.

The President. What are you doing?

Mr. Ward. Working hard.

The President. Me, too. [Laughter] It’s what you expect of me, though. [Laughter] Give me a little bit on your background. Went to high school——

Mr. Ward. Went to high school, and immediately out of high school I went into the military. I served 4 years in the U.S. Army.

The President. That’s good. Thanks. What high school?

Mr. Ward. Carver Vocational-Technical in Baltimore City. Born and raised in Baltimore City, Baltimore through and through.

The President. Are you a Ravens fan?

Mr. Ward. I am a Ravens fan.

The President. That’s good. That’s the right answer if you’re from Baltimore. Went to high school, went to the Army——

Mr. Ward. Once I got out of the military, I entered into a series of security positions. And a while after that, I was blessed with a son, who is here this morning.

The President. Where is the man?

Mr. Ward. Malcolm is right over there.

The President. Hi, Malcolm. I’ll see you afterwards.

As I understand, you’re a single dad.

Mr. Ward. Yes, I am.

The President. Thanks for doing your duty.

[Mr. Ward, College of Notre Dame of Maryland student and certified pharmacy technician, Johns Hopkins Health System, Baltimore, MD, made further remarks.]

The President. That’s good. Good job. By the way, the Labor Department entered into a contract with Johns Hopkins and the Baltimore Community College in order to have one of these collaborative efforts, a little extra funding to help employers and employees match up. Keep going.

Mr. Ward. Well, upon completion, I was offered employment as a pharmacy technician at Johns Hopkins Hospital, which I gladly accepted. I continued to go to school, as a part of the also-added benefit is the tuition-assistance program that Johns Hopkins offers. And after this semester, I’ll be 15 credits—about 15 credits away from having enough credits, 65 credits, to enter pharmacy school.

The President. Yes, see, that’s interesting, isn’t it? So then you get to pharmacy school. How long does that take?

Mr. Ward. That will be 4 intense years instead of 4 intense months.

The President. Yes, that’s okay. [Laughter]

[Mr. Ward made further remarks.]

The President. Are you getting any help to afford all this?

Mr. Ward. Well, the tuition assistance through Johns Hopkins helps a great deal.

The President. Yes. Part of the grant, by the way, is to help pay for tuition assistance.

Mr. Ward. It's a wonderful thing. [*Laughter*]

The President. It sure is. What's even more wonderful is both of your desires to use what's available to improve your skill set so you can realize dreams—in your case, be as good a dad as you can be. That's wonderful. That is what is possible and is happening all across the country.

So the reason we have people come and talk, other than me, is so, one, you'll listen—[*laughter*—and two, so the stories make sense. These stories make sense to me. It makes sense to support the community college system, a system that is able to adjust to meet the needs of the people that we taxpayers expect the community college to serve, people wanting to work, employers trying to find a skill set so the communities can stay vibrant and whole and jobs are available.

I told you, one of the objectives of Government is to set the conditions right for job growth. And a lot of that always times—a lot of times focuses on tax policy. And obviously, good tax policy matters, and—but also what matters is to make sure that people understand the relevance and importance of education. We must never lose sight of the need to have an education system which not only provides—gives people the basic skills working their way through elementary and secondary and high school but, equally importantly, an education system that's capable of keeping this country competitive by adjusting to the workplace as it really is.

I've come to herald success and a Governor who's successful in implementing a vision because he's got community colleges and community college presidents who are responsive to the needs of people. Again, I want to thank you all for letting me come. I hope you have found this as interesting as I have.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. at Anne Arundel Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Kendel S. Ehrlich, wife of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., of Maryland, and their son Drew; Nancy and Robert Ehrlich, Sr., the Governor's parents; and Foreign Minister Michel Barnier of France. Governor Ehrlich referred to Secretary Aris Melissaratos of the Maryland Department of

Business and Economic Development. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Gold Medal Posthumously to Jackie Robinson

March 2, 2005

Members of Congress, Mrs. Robinson, and Sharon and Dave, Laura and I are honored to be with you all as we honor your husband and your dad. Reverend Jackson. You know, I figure I'm the ninth speaker. [*Laughter*] I spent a little time in baseball. Commissioner, it's good to see you, and appreciate the McCourts being here, of the great Los Angeles Dodgers family. But a lot of times, the ninth hitter was told by the manager, "Keep your swing short." [*Laughter*] I kind of guess that's what Nancy Pelosi meant when I got up here. She said, "You are the ninth speaker." [*Laughter*] "How about keeping it short?"

I'm honored to be here for the—to present the Congressional Gold Medal to Mrs. Robinson. It's a great tradition of our Congress to honor fantastic and noble Americans, and we're doing just the thing today with Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

You know, he was a great ballplayer. Anybody who follows baseball knows how great he was—fantastic statistics, MVP, all the big honors you could get. But his electricity was unbelievable. Think about this. This is a guy who inspired little 7-year-olds to dream of wearing "42" and dashing for home in Brooklyn, and a 7-year-old like me hoping to get his Topps baseball card, even though I was an avid Giants fan. He was an amazing guy. And his story was powerful then, and it is powerful today.

His story is one that shows what one person can do to hold America account—to account to its founding promise of freedom and equality. It's a lesson for people coming up to see. One person can make a big difference in setting the tone of this country.

He always fought for what he called "first-class citizenship." That's an interesting phrase, isn't it, "first-class citizenship," not